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IRKUTSK AIR RECONNAISSANCE SUPPLIES TIMBER INFORMATION

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Irkutsk Oblast is one of th largest regions of the USSR producing raw materials. The forest area there represents 8.5 percent of the total Soviet wooded area. Coniferous and larch trees are predominant (66 percent), and the cedar tree is particularly valuable. The estimated average of trees felled in the oblast is 200 million cubic meters per year. Over the same period, growth of new trees produces a minimum of 30 million cubic meters of wood. Various wild animals abound in the woods; and fish, in the large Angara and Lena Rivers and their many tributaries. There are also many ore deposits in this region.

Air reconnaissance, which took place in 1948, represents one of the measures contributing to the study and protection of these wooded areas. The condition of 15 million hectares of forest was to be investigated, and areas where damages were caused by fire, winds, blight and felling were to be ascertained. A special problem was to uncover the breeding ground of the silkworm Dendrolimus Sibiricus Tschv. The exact location of each sector, its acreage, the amount and the cause of damage, and the approximate reserve of timber were to be investigated. The information collected was to provide a basis for preliminary damage estimates and tentative countermeasure plans.

The following method of investigation was worked out by the Ts NIILKh (Central Research Institute of Forestry):

During flights at an altitude of 300 - 400 meters over selected areas, a summary description of damaged sectors was made, and the location of these sectors indicated on a 5 kilometer : one centimeter map. Itineraries of flights were drawn parallel and 6, 8, or 10 kilometers distant from each other, depending on the importance of the area investigated. The information gathered was revised after the flight and damaged areas roughly indicated on a one kilometer : one centimeter map. A second flight was made at an altitude of 150 - 200 meters to determine precisely the boundaries of the sectors, their characteristics, and accessibility.

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Final reports were entered in a general notebook and sectors indicated on a general map.

Damages were investigated by special reconnaissance groups with the cooperation of parachute crews. Last year, 30 men, including five parachutists, participated in the work. The formed seven groups, each with an airplane, observers, forest specialists, etc.

Investigating flights were carried out from 15 June to 30 June and from 15 August to 30 August. Ground investigations were carried out from 20 June to 15 September. Eighty-eight sectors were checked, including 27 where parachuting was necessary. Ground crews covered a distance of 3,000 kilometers. Flying time, including training, control, liaison and parachuting flights totaled 1,000 hours. Average cost of investigating was below 0.05 rubles per hectare.

Valuable information, including a detailed study of the reproduction of silkworms was collected.

Investigation of 18 million hectares disclosed 494 damaged sectors covering an area of about 3 million hectares.

As a result of the operation, it appeared that sanitation measures would necessitate the felling of 394,000 hectares of damaged wood in 1949 - 1950. Thereafter, an additional 225,000 hectares could be exploited after a summary study of the condition of the trees and their economic possibilities.

About 990,000 hectares of forests, with a reserve of timber surpassing 100 million cubic meters, require further investigation of the possibilities of processing timber on the spot.

Experiments of air reconnaissance make it possible to draw the following conclusions:

1. Air reconnaissance in Siberia will justify itself after a number of years.

2. This method will make it possible to carry out in 2 or 3 years a complete investigation of damaged sectors, and these sectors will be earmarked for exploitation as a matter of priority.

3. Preliminary air reconnaissance considerably reduces the cost and the time of investigation.

4. Results achieved in 1948 must be widely studied and the method made available to the forestry and timber industry of the USSR.

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